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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the perceived threat of American cultural "imperialism" in Canada, the effect of constant exposure to American broadcasting on the Canadian national identity, the role broadcasting plays in shaping Canadian identity, and the efforts by the Canadian government to "Canadianize" its broadcasting. A brief history of the broadcast media and Canadian-American relations is presented along with reports which emphasize the vital role played by the media in establishing Canadian identity. Special attention is given to the development of Canadian cable television which has a special function within the broadcasting system. (RB)

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TEARING THE FABRIC OF CANADA: THE BROADCAST MEDIA AND CANADIAN IDENTITY

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"Our national purpose, as enunciated in the British North America Act, is 'peace, order, and good government'... Their purpose is 'the pursuit of happiness,' a psychic steeplechase which has been known to lead to insanity."

--Keith Davey
Member of Parliament

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Again, inspiration was supplied by my French speaking Canadian friends and other North American confidants.

Daily enthusiasm was provided by the Toronto Maple Leafs.

EFW
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The Candian national identity, a fragile and emerging concept, peeps out from under the heavy thumb of its North American neighbor to the south. At this point, the Canadian national identity is an insecure possession compared to a secure, if complacent, identity for the United States. The elements of Canadian identity have never been sufficiently isolated from the larger American image. They have never been precisely defined or clearly articulated. Who can say how the Canadian way of life fully differs from that of Americans? Yet, there are sharp distinctions between the Canadian experiment and the American dream.

Both began in the same virgin land mass rooted in the British common law tradition. But Canada adopted a Tory philosophy and the United States one of Jeffersonian liberalism. Americans cannot fully accept the integrity of Canadian nationhood, says one scholar,[1] for it was born of evolution and not revolution. The Canadian nation, a product of treaty and statute, does not take on the same moral commitment and historical significance as does the United States emerging from its War for Independence. Using historian Clinton Rossiter's concept of Americans being "a people of the covenant," we see them as accepting a compact and taking an oath of like-mindedness, for all their differences. Americans do not take the uncovenanted, the Canadians, seriously. Canadians cannot point to a social compact embodied in symbols: in a Declaration of Independence or Constitution. They share few overt symbols of nationhood. Modern Canadian identity was strengthened by the collective spirit fostered by World Wars I and II, the post war withdrawal of British authority in Canadian constitutional matters and the elimination of Dominion status in the post war years. Up until this post war period, Britain

was "the exemplar and inspiration of Canadian life."[2] As that tie loosened, the American example filled the vacuum, lauded by slogans celebrating the American-Canadian alliance: "Longest undefended border," "Friendly neighbor to the North." But what began as a handshake has turned into a choking grasp, and many Canadians worry about American domination of Canada. The "Little Brother" role has been comfortable but dangerous for Canada as contemporary critic George Grant says:

> Like most other human beings, Canadians want it both ways. We want through formal nationalism to escape the disadvantages of the American dream; yet we also want the benefits of junior membership in the empire. [3]

One theory of modern Canadian identity is that it is a counter-response to American identity--defining itself in negative terms to the United States.[4] Canada has so long lived in the shadow of the United States giant that asserting itself, economically, politically, or culturally, means dismissing some aspect of American life from the Canadian consciousness. To some Canadians, this means "defining ourselves in non-American terms"[5] and developing an "Apartness" from American definitions. As Canadian Senator Keith Davey said in his Report of the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media:

> Geography, language and perhaps a failure of confidence and imagination have made us into a cultural as well as an economic satellite of the United States... For all our similarities, for all our sharing, for all our friendship, we are somebody else. [6]

The mass media play an important role in this conflict. The mass media, recent research shows, assume a role in shaping identity consciousness, promoting unity among peoples, and as a communications tool. The Canadian government "recognizes communications as vital in our determination to maintain a national existence."[7] The broadcasting media are especially important and there Canada has rarely seen itself mirrored or its own image

reflected whole.

On a theoretical level, if we accept one definition of a "nation" as a people having more transactions with themselves than with outsiders, then a look at Canadian broadcasting suggests a threat to Canadian nationhood.[8] In the realm of broadcasting, communicating through speech and pictures, Americans are talking to Canadians more than Canadians are talking to Canadians. Canadians have the American home brought into their home every hour of the day through television and radio: the border becomes a fourth wall on which to project the play of American life and values, the Canadians paying to see the show. On the other hand, Canadian values or opinions are rarely imparted to Americans. As an American academician teaching Canadian studies has said:

> Most Canadians have a considerable, if malevolent knowledge of the United States, while most Americans have a benevolent ignorance of Canada.[9]

Canada never preached a "melting pot theory" as did the U.S. Canada adhered to a "sovereignty of nations"--the integrity of each ethnic group to remain whole within its borders. America's "sovereignty of individuals" allows all people to conform equally to "Americanism." This theory continues with the assertion that "there is no process in becoming Canadian akin to conversion, there is no pressure for conformity, <u>there is no Canadian way of life.</u>"[10] Canadian provincialism, the ideal that each ethnic and regional group should develop its own expression, works against a single concept of national identity. Provincialism is a much stronger identification in Canada than is statehood in the United States: whether a man considers himself a Canadian or a Newfoundlander is a crucial identity question. This idea has been called the "Canadian Mosaic"--different colors and sizes fitted into a whole.

According to a government policy statement, Canadian "broadcasting has the vitally important task of identifying and strengthening cultural entities and community loyalities."[11] The balance of the mosaic, the sovereignty of the English and French elements of Canada, is a task which the Canadian government does not take lightly. Northrop Frye, a Canadian man of letters, has explained this dichotomy as "the tension between the political sense of unity and the imaginative sense of locality."[12] Canadian broadcasting is charged with the mission of strengthening regional identity and at the same time reinforcing national identity; two nervous horses pulling in opposite directions.

This paper will attempt to make a number of vital connections: the perceived threat of American cultural "imperialism" in Canada; the effect of constant exposure to American broadcasting on the Canadian national identity; the role broadcasting plays in shaping Canadian identity; efforts by the Canadian government to "Canadianize" its broadcasting.

There will be special attention paid to the develpment of Canadian cable television which has a special function within the broadcasting system. This paper will not strive to distinguish the good guys from the bad guys: Canadians have accepted American television as willingly as American broadcasters have offered it to them. But in light of a blossoming awareness on the part of many Canadians, and other world peoples, of the sanctity of their own histories and cultures, and the artificial insemination of Americanism in their countries, this paper does want to articulate the problem as it pertains to Canadian broadcasting, the most vulnerable of Canadian media.

II The Mandate

From the outset of transmission of broadcasting signals, beginning with radio in the 1920's, Canada has been concerned with American domination of the airwaves. In 1919, the Canadian government began to control and license radio stations and receiving sets, while in the United States, spectrum use was still chaotic. In 1921, when the U.S. had begun to move toward broadcast controls, only six clear channels on the continent were allotted to Canada. A ritual developed: every other year America would appropriate all the North American channels, claiming allocation of channels should be on the basis of population irrespective of geography, and Canada would complain bitterly. This argument continued unresolved until 1927 when the two countries appointed delegations to negotiate channel allocations. America demanded seventy-seven clear channels, again leaving Canada only six. Negotiations broke off until 1937 when North American frequency allocations were secured in a treaty signed in Havana.

During this time, Canada strove for a "national" system of broadcasting, described by Sir Henry Thornton as "an instrument for the clearer delineation of a Canadian identity."[13] In 1929, the Aird Commission on broadcasting found unanimity in Canada on a fundamental question: "Canadian radio listeners wanted Canadian broadcasting."[14] By 1932, a number of factors were disconcerting to Canadians and indicated early American dominance in broadcasting. The aggregate power of all Canadian stations, by 1932, was well under 10% of the combined U.S. wattage. Secondly, much of the Canadian power that did exist was concentrated in the two largest cities, Montreal and Toronto.

By this time, two Toronto stations and two in Montreal were also serving as "part time outlets" for American networks, and nearly 40% of these stations'

programming was American.[15] As historian E.A. Weir has said: "Many Canadians were becoming alarmed that Canada was fast becoming a mere satellite of American broadcasting."[16]

The thrust towards a national, public, broadcasting system was a positive effort to develop the Canadian identity and a negative reaction to American influences on Canadian nationality. Introducing the National Radio Act to the first Parliamentary Committee on radio in 1932, Prime Minister Bennett asserted:

> This country must be assured of complete Canadian control of broadcasting from Candian sources, free from foreign interference or influence. Broadcasting must become an agency by which national consciousness may be fostered and sustained and national unity still further strengthened.[17]

In supporting the National Radio Act in 1932, the Canadian Radio League used such slogans as: "Canadian Radio for Canadians" and "The State or the United States."[18] Says historian Frank W. Peers of the move towards national broadcasting: "Often the objective was described negatively as the development of an identity separate and distinguishable from that of the United States."[19]

Ever since, Canadian government committees, study groups and legislation on broadcasting have had as their aim, the cultivation of Canadian broadcasting for increased identity awareness. The Radio Act of 1932 insisted broadcasting be utilized "for developing a greater National and Empire consciousness within the Dominion."[20] The Massey Report in 1951 expressed "fear of Americanization" of Canadian broadcasting.[21] The Report of the Royal Commission on Broadcasting in 1957 said: "...as a nation, we cannot accept in these powerful and persuasive media, the natural and complete flow of another nation's culture without danger to our national identity."[22] A White Paper on Broadcasting, out of the Secretary of State's office in Ottawa, in 1966, maintained; "The determination to develop

and maintain a national system of radio and television is an essential part of the continuing resolve for Canadian identity and Canadian unity."[23]

Nowhere is the Canadian resolve for broadcasting to serve the national interest more pronounced than in recent, major legislation, the Broadcasting Act of 1968. It was based on the findings of a Committee on Broadcasting, chaired in 1965 by MP Robert W. Fowler. The Act set up the Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC), replacing the Broadcast Board of Governors established in 1957. But most important for our purposes was the language of the Act and the place it reserved for cable television in the national system.

In the Act, Parliament articulated its concern for Canadian broadcasting to serve the national interest. It recognized the special function and responsibility broadcasting has in shaping national identity, and so mandated broadcasting to:

> be effectively owned and controlled by Canadians so as to safeguard, enrich and strengthen the cultural, political and social and economic fabric of Canada and it should contribute to the development of national unity and provide for a continuing expression of Canadian identity.[24]

The Act of 1968 marked government policy towards cable television. Cable is to be integrated into a single national system, to supplement and not compete with other parts of the broadcasting system. Subsequent policy statements on cable, in April, 1969 and April, 1970, were much concerned with the American impact on cable programming and sought to find a Canadian answer. Newer policy statements will be discussed later.

The Special Senate Committee on Mass Media (the Davey Committee), in 1971, was most cognizant of the need for Canadian broadcasting to come into its own: "The Canadian media, especially broadcasting, have an interest in and an obligation to promote our apartness from the American reality."[25] A timely study and policy statement entitled, "Proposals for a Communications Policy for Canada," coming

out of the Ministry of Communications (overseer of telecommunications and common carrier, and not maker of broadcasting policy), addressed itself to this question:

> How can Canadian telecommunications systems be developed and used to foster Canadian social and cultural values, and to provide a sure means of disseminating a Canadian perception of Canada and of the world to all Canadians? 26

This brief history was meant to give the reader an idea of the continuing concern of the Canadian government about American influence in Canadian broadcasting. We shall proceed to look at the extent of that American influence, and the strange part played by community antenna television in replacing a Canadian dialogue with an American monologue beamed to Canadians.

III Canada: A Large Fifty-first State?

There are several ways that American programs find their way to Canadian television screens. American-produced programs can be bought by Canadian stations and broadcast directly. American channels can beam their signals over the border into Canada for a larger audience and market. Canadians can seek out American programs, hauling American signals across the border using tall antennas. Or, American channels can be piped into the Canadian home by Canadian cable television companies. Whether brought in, bounced over, beckoned into, or piped through--American programs fill the air waves all over Canada.

To fully understand the ubiquitous American presence in Canadian broadcasting, one must realize the dual aspects of American programming in Canada. Firstly, the Canadian national networks, the CBC and CTV, import many American-produced programs for their channels. Two local examples might be helpful. A program

content analysis was undertaken by W. Brian Stewart in various Canadian cities during one week in November, 1970 during peak viewing hours from seven to eleven in the evening. Halifax, Nova Scotia is served by two Canadian stations, one owned by the CBC, the other by CTV. No American stations are available without the use of cable. On the Canadian stations, of 112 half-hour programs cast during the viewing time analyzed, 50 programs, 45%, were Canadian produced; 55 programs, 49%, were American-produced; 7 programs, 6%, were produced in the United Kingdom. The study says fourteen of the 56 half-hour periods had no Canadian programs available on either channel. The viewer had the choice of watching foreign programming or turning off his set.

Toronto is reached by six over the air television stations, one CBC, one CTV, one independent Canadian station and three American stations in Buffalo. The six stations offered 336 half-hour programs during the prime time study period: 67 programs, 20%, were Canadian (11% of these on the CBC); 252 programs, a whopping 75%, were American produced; 17 programs, 5%, were made in the United Kingdom. During twelve half-hour periods no Canadian programming was available.[27]

An analysis from the CBC Annual Report of 1969-1970, of program content of the English language CBC network during a representative winter week in 1970, shows a similar bent towards American programs. During the week, 36.5% of all programs on the CBC network were American-produced, 59.3% were Canadian. Almost all information programs, a specialty of the CBC, 97%, were Canadian. Light entertainment programs, a Hollywood specialty, was comprised of 67% American-produced and 27% Canadian produced. Even the French language CBC programming was 16.6% American and 28% of French network entertainment was American made.[28] The top ten programs on the CBC included seven American shows; 47 of the 50 most popular shows in Canada were American.